

Getting Ready lesson: January 2009

“Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans?”

Prior to today's lesson, you will need to gather some facts about New Orleans that you find interesting. You can use the description piece written by Dr. Larry Powell entitled “New Orleans: An American Pompeii”. You can also draw from other books or Web sites. [MSN Encarta](#) has a good introduction to the city, or go to the page of [New Orleans links](#) at the ELCA Youth Gathering Web site.

You will also need a candle in a candle holder and a [map of New Orleans](#). You will use these to decorate an altar that will serve as the centerpiece for your group's meetings each month. You will also need one small rock per group member.

Learning Objectives:

1. Participants will begin to understand the diversity, beauty, and importance of New Orleans.
 2. Participants will be able to identify the spiritual significance of specific *places* in their lives.
 3. Participants will begin to care for New Orleans as a specific location in which Christ meets real people.
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Ritual

Begin today's lesson by preparing your group's altar in the center of your room. The altar can be a small table or simply the floor. It should be in the center of your group. Place the map of New Orleans upon the altar and the candle upon the map. You might also want to add a cross or other symbols that have become important to your group.

Explain to your group that the candle in the center of the group will serve as a reminder that God is present and active among them. The map will serve as a reminder that Jesus Christ is present and active in the city of New Orleans. Maybe this preparation of the altar can be your group's ritual, or maybe you have a different ritual you use to begin your time together. Regardless, it is important to find some way to begin your time together so that your group recognizes the importance of what is about to happen.

Check-in

At the end of your ritual, give your group approximately 1 minute in silence to prayerfully reflect upon their most recent trip. Ask them to recall two things: a moment when they would say they saw a glimmer of God's grace, and a moment when they would say they saw pain or hurt. Allow each group member to share their experiences of grace and pain from their most recent travels. Ask the group what they might learn from what was shared and how they might apply it to their journey to New Orleans.

Introduction

Today's lesson is going to introduce us to the beauty and grace of New Orleans, but also to its pain and hurt.

Ask your group to generate a list of stereotypes that they have heard about New Orleans. Once the group has done this, take a moment to share with them some of the things you have learned about New Orleans in preparation for this lesson. Ask the group members to add things they know about New Orleans.

Experience

Play the following video clip from PBS's American Experience episode on New Orleans.¹ You can access it on-line [here](#).² Click "Watch the Program" and then choose "Chapter 1". It is 3 minutes and 6 seconds long. If you do not have high speed Internet you can probably order this video through your local library or video store, or you can purchase it [here](#). It is a great introduction to New Orleans before and after Hurricane Katrina, and it's recommended to show it to your group before your trip.

Discussion

Break your group into five equal groups (or divide them in any other way you see fit). Give each group a sheet of newsprint and markers or crayons. Assign each group one of the five questions below. Ask them to discuss their questions and draw a representation of their answer on their sheet of newsprint. After about 10 minutes, have each small group report back to the large group. Allow members of the large group to add their thoughts to each small group's report. *(Note: These questions are designed to reflect back on the video mentioned above. If you do not use the video, you will need to craft new questions.)*

1. What exactly would America be without New Orleans?
2. Why is the future so visible in New Orleans? What might that future look like?
3. What are New Orleans' gifts?
4. What are New Orleans' flaws?
5. Why is New Orleans so important to the people who live there?

After you've discussed the above questions, transition into the next segment by stressing how important it is that your group begins to think about New Orleans as a *place* where people live, go to school, raise families, go to church, and die. It is a special *place* that people call home. Point out to your group that when we travel, we generally do not think of the *places* we visit as someone's home, but rather as a destination for tourism. Our plan is to enter New Orleans this summer as humble guests who view New Orleans as the hometown of many people and a *place* where God is at work in peoples' lives.

Scripture

Have your group gather around your congregation's baptismal font. Before you read the text, remind your group that the font is one specific *place* where we experience God's presence and activity in our lives. Tell them that the text you will be reading is a story about the Israelites experiencing God's presence and activity in the midst of water.

Read [Joshua 4:1-24](#)

Ask the group:

1. What did God do here?
2. How did the Israelites mark the spot?
3. Why did they mark this spot?

Give each group member a rock and explain to them that these rocks are symbolic of the *places* where we believe we encounter Christ. Ask them to move back to your original meeting space in silence. As they walk they should hold their rock and think of a *place* where they have experienced Christ's presence and activity.

¹ Pollak, Amanda, Stephen Ives, Jenny Carchman, Michelle Ferrari, and Jeffrey Wright. *New Orleans*. Boston: WGBH Educational Foundation, 2007.

²<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/neworleans/index.html>

Reflection

Once your group is back in its original meeting spot, ask each group member to share a *place* that they would consider to be “holy,” where they’ve experienced Jesus’ presence and activity.

Wrap Up

Remind your group that New Orleans is not just a tourist’s destination; it is a real *place* where real people live. It has historically been a gift to our country in diversity and culture. When we travel there, we will enter as humble guests to the city ready to serve, not as loud tourists ready to party and spend. Christ is present and active in New Orleans and our trip there will be an opportunity for us to enter into Christ’s presence and activity in that *place*.

Benediction

As a closing prayer, have each group member add his or her stone to the altar as he or she adds one way that the group can honor New Orleans and the people who live there during your trip.

Prayer

Close with prayer.